

JOHNSON (H.H.)

DENTAL EDUCATION.*

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I have said that I would never attempt to produce a paper on this threadbare subject for the reason that to some it is likely to be tiresome, while in others a feeling may be engendered and heated discussion follow which would tend to jeopardize the peace and harmony which should exist among the members of the profession, and this society particularly.

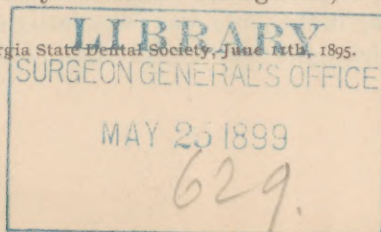
To cover the field that I desired, the right of free speech had to be exercised. I therefore ask for that indulgence fully. I also wish to state that in the production of this paper I have not indulged in personalities, but my remarks will be directed at a dangerous and growing evil that through the educational centers of America is affecting the profession in the greater part of the country. With the hope that I might be able to possibly arouse the profession to a knowledge of the presence of this dangerous period a sense of *duty* has prompted me to write as I have.

Men wiser than I have looked into the dim vista of the future, foreseen and given warnings concerning the dangerous era toward which we were slowly but surely drifting, and to which we have now about arrived—but these warnings have been allowed to pass unheeded.

We, as a profession, in America have boasted of our wonderful progress and leadership and we have progressed and led the world in everything pertaining to the profession while some of our sister countries have turned green with jealousy and envy. We have also, as citizens, boasted of our *free* country, and the fact now confronts us that we have been a little too free with everything pertaining to our professions.

Other countries have watched our progress with an envious eye as we have rushed madly forward to supremacy; but in our haste we have made glaring mistakes, which they have seen and wisely profited by. England, some years ago, saw whither she was drifting. In spite of all the educational influence that could be brought to bear, the barbers and blacksmiths who had obtained a foothold were a deadweight that dragged them down below the level of respectability. The few progressive educated men struggled and pulled, but their influence and strength were not sufficient to hold up this deadweight of ignorance to the level of the other professions, and so dentistry remained unrecognized, socially, for the time

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being. To be a dentist was much the same as to be a barber, a blacksmith or a corn-doctor. Why? Because this mass of ignorance was their legally licensed competitors in the same occupation. To recognize dentistry, socially and professionally, was to recognize a class that could not be recognized. Things were getting desperate; something had to be done, and done quickly and boldly. The standard had to be raised to a plane so high there would be no encouragement for this class to make the attempt. They did not go up step by step; there was no time for that. But the law could not be made retroactive, and although no more of this class has been or is now admitted, it will take years to get rid of those who have already become registered, and until they are weeded out, dentistry in England cannot stand entirely free and untrammelled on an equal footing with the other professions.

In America our case, in the beginning, was a little different. We started in advance on a higher plane of respectability, but in educational requirements we have advanced by very slow degrees. Indeed, it cannot be truthfully denied that almost anyone who applied could gain admission to our ranks who could raise the necessary college fees—former education, character, or qualification not being considered. These are indisputable facts. For a long time no form of a preliminary examination to ascertain the literary qualifications of the applicants was required. None were turned away who applied for admission to the colleges and the cases were rare indeed where one was rejected at the end of his college term.

Now we have advanced a step further and require a *form* of a preliminary examination; but I am sorry to say, in the majority of cases it seems to be a mere matter of form, and I am afraid it will continue to be such as long as colleges are run as business institutions. In America we have them springing up all over the country and, unfortunately, they cannot be considered educational centers in the full and entire acceptance of the term, but largely business enterprises. Business is business in America, and undoubtedly some of these institutions are organized for business, run on a business basis by business men. The first requisite to make the thing pay is to procure material with which to work, and as it takes some tact as well as hustling to get up the material in sufficient quantities the *quality* cannot in all cases be taken into consideration, as the poor material is just as profitable as the better quality. In very many cases it must be presumed that the preliminary examination consisted in ascertaining if the party was pecuniarily qualified, as that would seem to be about the only qualification that many matricu-

lates could possibly have possessed. It is an alarming fact that the profession in the South, and I suppose elsewhere, is becoming literally chucked full of inappreciative, illiterate and incompetent men who have not the faintest conception of anything professional and who have not ambition enough to raise themselves above the common level of carpenters. A trade or occupation is their ambitious aim—something lighter than plowing a mule, swinging an axe, or lugging brick up a ladder. They go to a dental college to learn a *business*, just like learning the jewelry trade, telegraphy, type-writing, or something of that kind, in which they can invest a small amount and get quick returns. They stay the allotted time, are awarded a certificate and come out *ready* for business, and they want business. One of the qualifications necessary to success in a business life is to know how to advertise, and so they start at it. Noticing that all the mercantile houses advertise that they undersell their competitors to draw trade, they likewise adopt the principle and advertise to underwork everybody else. And so it goes, from bad to worse, and it is going to get worse until it strikes the very bottom, and we will become suddenly awakened from our lethargy by the fact that necessity will compel us to adopt some means for relief. The term should be again lengthened, thereby raising the standard, and the colleges should be *forced* to carry out the obligations which they assume on becoming members of the National Association of Dental Faculties.

What does a preliminary examination amount to when students are admitted to colleges who cannot read or write? It is terrible, appalling, and unless something is done our boasted professional standing will be limited to a few years when we will find ourselves a lot of carpenters, planing for a living. If we were to start now we would find that, like England, it would take fifty years to eliminate the deadweight of ignorance which would be continually hindering our rising by pulling us back.

As the ranks become full and competition increases and prices become low, making it impossible to earn a respectable living without very hard and continued labor, the profession will gradually sink to the level of a trade and there will be no inducement for educated men to seek its ranks as an occupation for their life-work.

It is a lamentable fact that the majority of men now seeking admission are illiterate and unpolished. After a man of this character, whose means are limited, has been matriculated at a college and allowed to attend three years of lectures and spent the hard earnings that have been saved up by careful economy, it seems

cruel, I know, for the faculty of that college to refuse him a diploma, and it is also hard for an examining board, knowing the circumstances, to refuse him a license. For such an unfortunate a tender sympathy is aroused in every heart. The college knew his lack of foundation and he should never have been admitted, to start with, then the complication would have easily been avoided. Stop them before they begin and avoid future trouble and do a service that will be a life benefit to the applicants, as well.

In speaking thus, I do not desire to be understood as being in favor of discouraging or closing the gates to honorable, brainy, and ambitious young men who have had to work their own way through the world. To all such I say, with feeling, extend a helping hand and bid them welcome with words of cheer. But in this day of free schools, free education and cheap literature, that requires only the will and application to acquire it, the boy who grows to maturity without an English education or any degree of gentlemanly polish, shows a decided lack of the essential element necessary to make a man of himself, and it may be put down as certain that such is exceedingly poor material with which to undertake to elevate a profession.

In the language of Doctor Pepper, who wrote on this subject, "It avails nothing to point to the rare illustrious men who have leaped at a few bounds from the plowshare to the front rank of scientific or judicial eminence, and who have served immemorably as instances to support the fallacy of those who, from selfish motives or from ignorant prejudice, decry thorough education. Let not the rest of us, only ordinary sons of toil, be misled by the hope of such exceptional careers."

Had these great men to whom Doctor Pepper alluded had the advantages of education they might have eclipsed their own records as far as they eclipsed that of the outside world. There will be fewer of these wonderful feats in the future. The educated man goes forth so much better equipped it will be very hard indeed for the uneducated to stand side by side with him in the arts and sciences of the day.

In casting around for a suggestion to remedy our trouble I will venture to say that the State of New York has the only ideal law as regards professional education in America. The Board of Regents, who are elected by the legislature, conducts both the preliminary and final examinations. The colleges are simply educators. A man comes and presents a certificate from the Board of Regents to the college faculty and is matriculated forthwith. Without this

certificate he cannot, under any circumstances, be entered in any college in New York State. This certificate represents about the same qualification as a second grade teachers' certificate in Georgia. At the end of the third session the applicant goes before the Board of Regents, not the faculty, and if found worthy receives a diploma. The office of the colleges is to impart the information. The Regents award the certificates of merit. If such a law could be passed in every State in the Union what a glorious era would dawn upon us! We can hardly hope for so much as that; but it does seem that we might reasonably hope to see the colleges enter into an agreement to admit none except those possessing second grade teachers' certificates or possessing qualifications to that extent. Let the Board of Education in the several counties do the preliminary examining, and let none be received who will not submit to such requirement. A man who knocks at the door of an honorable profession, expecting to have conferred on him the title of Doctor, which should, and has, ever since the beginning of the world, been considered a mark of meritorious distinction, ought, in the name of reason and common sense, to possess education enough to pass a second grade teachers' examination.

That would be low, very low; but, my God, how thankful we should be to get up that high!

Is it any wonder that other countries have shut their doors to our graduates? We cannot see how they are to be blamed. Almost all countries of importance now have a higher standard than we—especially in *preliminary requirements*. This is the point upon which I desire to lay stress particularly. To show you how utterly lacking we are in our preliminary requirement, I will quote a few extracts from the laws of other countries.

In the Province of Manitoba the requirement is a certificate of intermediate examination of a high school.

New Brunswick requires a fair knowledge of English grammar, composition, arithmetic, geography, English and Canadian history, algebra, geometry, chemistry and Latin..

Nova Scotia requires a compulsory examination in the English language, including grammar, composition and writing, decimal fractions and the extraction of the square root; algebra, to the end of simple equations; geometry, to the first three books of Euclid; Latin, one book translation and grammar; elementary mechanics of solids and fluids.

France requires a preliminary examination in the History of France, geography, arithmetic, either physics or chemistry; either

algebra, geometry or mechanics ; either zoology, botany, or geology ; either the English or German language.

The Royal College of Surgeons, of Edinburg, requires that all students who intend becoming candidates for the license in dental surgery shall have their names inscribed in the register of dental students, instituted by the general medical council. Such candidates must pass the complete examination in the following subjects: (1) English language, including grammar and composition ; (2) Latin, including grammar, translation from specified authors, and translation of easy passages, not taken from such authors ; (3) Elements of mathematics, comprising arithmetic, including vulgar and decimal fractions ; algebra, including simple equations ; geometry, including the first book of Euclid, with easy questions on the subject matter of same ; elementary mechanics of solids and fluids, comprising the elements of statistics, dynamics and hydrostatics, and one of the following optional subjects : Greek, French, German, Italian, or any other modern language ; logic, botany, zoology ; elementary chemistry.

Compare these preliminary requirements with *our* standard and see if your cheeks will not tingle with shame. It cannot truthfully be said that our people have not the advantages of literary educational institutions. We have as good schools and colleges as are to be found in the world. And we have boys and men who are as well educated as are to be found in the world, but these do not apply for admission into our profession. They seek professions where their colleagues are their equals, educationally and socially.

I am putting it mildly, very mildly, when I say that numbers of students are graduated every year whose education is so limited they could not obtain a clerkship in a dry goods store. Yet they go proudly forth, armed with a diploma and the honorary title of Doctor. I hope, sincerely, that such proceedings may eventually redound to the shame and disgrace of any institution wilfully violating such a trust, by practicing such grasping, discreditable and unprofessional acts.

Make the profession worthy of recognition by admitting educated members and there will be no need for further worry on that account. It *will* be recognized.

